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### A Review of: "Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities"

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*Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Moral Courage*, then, is an important book about a subject of great urgency for persons of faith today. If I may be forgiven one last quibble, I wish that the book had been edited more skillfully to make it accessible to a wide audience. At times the argument seems circular and repetitive. The excellent gathering of resources (organizations, curricula, resource persons, and websites) would have been more helpful as a detailed appendix than as an interruption in the flow of thought in the book.

*Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Moral Courage* does indeed fulfill the promise of the subtitle, to present motives and designs for ministry in a troubled world. It is well worth reading not only by those who educate or study liturgy, but also by leaders and members of local congregations.

Ruth Duck

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EDUCATING PEOPLE OF FAITH: EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. By John van Engen (Ed). Grand Rapids (MI)/Cambridge (UK): William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004.

This volume contains sixteen richly detailed and documented studies, written by a group of Jewish, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant historians. The studies show how spiritual formation took place in Jewish and Christian communities, from the days of the early synagogues and churches till the Reformation era. *Educating People of Faith* portrays the lived practices that shaped the faith of Jews and Christians. Although extraordinary figures like Maimonides, Augustine, and Luther are not absent in this volume, the authors focused on the contextual character of religious formation. The essays seek to overcome the separation between the “intellectual” and the “social” that has too often restricted historians’ understanding of those human communities that were oriented by and to an overarching account of themselves and their world. Although the “ordinary” Jews and Christians are the models in this book, the essays focus on a complex of historic practices and human acts that must somehow take in countless individual choices and a spectrum of attitudes.

The editor, John Van Engen, presents several reasons why medieval and modern historians largely missed the opportunity to take advantage of the “formation” paradigm. After all, most of them were themselves religious, and took the formative disciplines for granted, as

a second nature and felt no need of deliberate historical reflection or investigation. Or they took them as practices peculiar to themselves, as that which set them apart as “religious,” or as practices they were anxious to cast off. By contrast historians of religious “peoples” have tended to look for a “lay” stance opposed to religious disciplining by authorities lay or ecclesiastical. And historians of education often have focused more on cognitive or narrowly pedagogical issues.

The historians who contributed to *Educating People of Faith* were fascinated with the whole range of human experience, inclusive of the formative practices in shaping religious attitudes and practices. Their object is the popular religion, the folk religion or the “lived religion,” the religion people lived and practiced as distinguished from that leaders or books may have prescribed. So this book is about all the thousands of Jewish congregations and Christian parishes across Europe. The authors show, as far as the lack of written sources on popular religion permits them, the ritual, ethical, and devotional practices of religious formation through catechesis, study of Scripture, sacraments, rituals, preaching, sacred spaces, cults of saints, and shrines in the ordinary choices of daily life. They carefully cover the nature of religious education across all social levels, from the textual formation of highly literate rabbis and monks engaged in Scripture studies to the local formation of illiterate medieval laity for whom public preaching by wandering preachers, street performances of religious drama, and the veneration of saints’ shrines were profoundly formative.

Robert Goldenberg illustrates very clearly in his contribution on “Religious Formation in Ancient Judaism” that in the period of ancient Judaism the official literature on religious formation shows that none of the writers of those days claimed to speak for the ordinary Jews. In fact, none of them expressed much respect for the lives such people must have led nor took any responsibility at all for their religious formation these Jews must have undergone in and after childhood. About such Jews we know almost nothing, just odds and ends of information. Still, it is clear that such ordinary people did undergo a very strong formation. The Jewish tradition could not otherwise have survived at all. Without such Jews the rabbinic tradition could not have taken root and prospered.

It is obvious that in this line the essays only present the religious education of children as a component of the broader spiritual formation of the people of faith. Only some authors describe explicitly the religious formation of children, as does Harakas in his “Faith Formation in Byzantium,” describing the incarnational ethos of Eastern Christianity, the religious, mainly liturgical, initiation of children. After

John Chrysostom's plea's for baptizing children, the traditional home-based religious instruction continued to be practiced in Christian homes through subsequent centuries. But religious education and formation in Byzantium were augmented by a socialization process expressed liturgically and sacramentally.

Signer, who is also explicit about the religious instruction of children, informs the reader about education in premodern Judaism. He presents the community and family as the foundations of Jewish education. He refers to the gathering before the Water Gate in Jerusalem, when Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding (Nehemiah 8). Signer shows that if the community as an assembly is a significant locus for instruction, the Hebrew Bible also emphasizes the family and its home as a place for learning. He also writes about the school initiation ceremony that became common in medieval Germany. It was the charming ceremony of eating sweet cakes shaped as letters and licking the tablet with letters traced with honey, on the first day a child begins to study of the Torah outside the home.

Signer points out that Ivan Marcus wrote about this ceremony in his *Rituals of Childhood—Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (1996, New Haven, Yale University Press). Signer does not refer to the subtitle of Marcus' study, which shows how Jews polemically transformed Christian religious symbols into Jewish counter images to affirm the truth of Judaism and make sense of living in an intensely Christian culture.

So he ignores, as all the authors of *Educating People of Faith* more or less do, the influences of cultural exchanges between traditions of religious formation. Information about the Maccabean uprising against the Hellenist "enkyklios paidea," the canon of Greek culture and religion, could for instance have been an interesting example of cultural and religious exchange on the educational level. This is especially relevant because Harakas refers to the significance of the "engyklios paideusis" for the religious formation in the Byzantine era.

Van Engen explains in his introduction to the book that the authors struggled with the impossibly strained triangulation of present-day questions, historic sources, and methodological queries. Just because of the worldwide present-day questions concerning interreligious encounters and their educational consequences, an essay about educational religious exchanges could have given a precious extra dimension to this interesting and excellent collection of essays.

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